

History in the Making

Volume 8

Article 11

January 2015

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Recommended Citation

Anthony, Steven (2015) "Here and There, Now and Then: Portrayals of the Third Crusade in Film and How their Inaccuracies Encompass Contemporary Movements," *History in the Making*: Vol. 8 , Article 11.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making/vol8/iss1/11>

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Here and There, Now and Then: Portrayals of the Third Crusade in Film and How their Inaccuracies Encompass Contemporary Movements

by Steven Anthony

Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between films dealing with historical events and how they encompass events of the time the film was made. This work uses two film representations of the Third Crusade, from 1187 – 1192; the first is Youssef Chahines' 1963 film Al Nasser Salah Ad-Din and the second is Ridley Scotts' 2005 film, Kingdom of Heaven. Between the films' narrations of events and the actual history, parallels are created between past and present, dealing with ideas such as tolerance and peaceful dialogue, as well as movements such as national, ethnic, or religious unity and inclusiveness.

Introduction

The sounds echo for miles with the clash of steel, battle cries, and the thunder of hoof beats under the unforgiving heat of the desert sun. It is the Battle of Hattin of 1187, one of the most famous battles from the Crusades in which the Muslim armies overtook the crusaders; but all is not as it appears. The smell of fresh popcorn wafts temptingly in the air, the excited cries of children can be heard close by, and while it is the middle of the day with the heat of the sun beating down on the Battle of Hattin, the audience sits mesmerized in the cool, dark theater. Yes, that large silver screen shows many things to many people; whether it is glorious reminiscence of the past, joyous tales of the present, or haunting looks into the future. Cinema is the medium through which a thousand feelings are communicated in moments and it is a universal form of art around the world.

No genre evokes the power of film better than the historical drama. These particular types of films not only tell great stories and tales of the past; but also encompass the present through modes of storytelling, depictions of people, and the development of the plot. Egypt's 1963 film *Al Nasser Salah Ad-Din (Saladin)*¹ and America's 2005 film *Kingdom of Heaven* both present the same events of the Third Crusade; yet, the messages, depictions of events, and portrayals of the people are completely different. Is it simply ideas expressed by the directors, or does it have more to do with when and where the films came out that shaped their messages? Film is more than simple entertainment, it is a lens that can clarify a time or place in modern history. However, one must always be leery when looking at that silver screen because it can tell more about a people, a time, or culture than one ever wanted to know. This paper is designed to examine key events and personalities on a case-by-case basis to see how the same historical proceedings can be depicted through various lenses of distortion

¹ To avoid confusion all instances of the 1963 film will be italicized to separate it from discussions of Saladin the man.

created by cultures and contemporary events within a nation. These representations can alter the morals, historical accuracy, and tone within a film to both positive and negative effects.

Kingdom of Heaven was produced by 20th Century Fox Film Corporation and was directed by famed English director Ridley Scott. *Kingdom of Heaven* was filmed throughout 2004 in the countries of Morocco and Spain, and was released in May of 2005.² *Saladin* was produced by Lotus Films and directed by long-time Egyptian director, Youssef Chahine. *Saladin* was released to Arab audiences in 1963, but did not receive international distribution until 1983, with all of the filming done in Egypt.³

Both of these films cover the Third Crusade that occurred between 1187-1192,⁴ however both films also cover some of the events leading up to the Third Crusade beginning as early as 1184. What distinguishes these two films is the emphasis placed on events and what events are covered. *Kingdom of Heaven* focuses primarily on events leading up to Saladin's 1187 siege and conquest of Jerusalem beginning sometime around 1184, while *Saladin* gives a more sweeping coverage of the entire Third Crusade or in terms of a timeline roughly 1186-1192.

Kingdom of Heaven centers on Balian, a blacksmith that is brought to the Middle East by Godfrey of Ibelin sometime around 1184. After being mortally wounded, Godfrey names Balian his heir and requests he continue on to Jerusalem, where he meets the crusaders Guy of Lusignan and Tiberias, Sibylla the princess of Jerusalem and wife of Guy, and finally, and most importantly, the leper king of Jerusalem Baldwin IV. Baldwin welcomes Balian and gives him an order to protect all the caravans and pilgrims traveling to and from Jerusalem, particularly the Jewish and Muslim travelers. While Balian carries out his task, Guy and his

² "Kingdom on Heaven, " Internet Movie Database, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0320661/locations?ref_=tt_dt_dt.

³ "El Naser Salah el Dine," Internet Movie Database, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0057357/?ref_=rvi_tt.

⁴ Thomas Asbridge, *The Crusades: The Authoritative History of the War for the Holy Land* (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 2010), 370, 512.

ally, Reynald of Chatillon, carry out attacks on caravans in the hope of starting a war with Saladin. Their plan succeeds and Saladin leads his forces to Kerak where they are briefly stalled until Baldwin IV and his army arrive from Jerusalem. Neither desiring bloodshed, Baldwin and Saladin agree to a truce with the condition that Saladin withdraw his forces. The journey, proving too much, causes Baldwin to succumb to his leprosy placing his sister Sibylla as queen and Guy as king. Freed from all of Baldwin's agreements, Guy and Reynald gather their forces and launch an attack against Saladin at Hattin in 1187, which fails miserably. With no one else left to lead, Balian organizes a desperate defense against Saladin's army with the hope that a long siege will create an opportunity for negotiations. Not desiring a long siege, Saladin meets with Balian and agrees to let the people of Jerusalem leave unmolested. The film concludes with Sibylla and Balian returning to his home in Europe where they are met by the forces of Richard I looking to recruit Balian, who declines and sends the crusaders on their way.

Saladin begins with Reynald of Chatillon's attack on Muslim caravans leading to the Battle of Hattin in 1187 and follows the movements of Saladin as he slowly takes control of the Holy Land from the crusaders. Following Saladin's victory at Kerak, the Princess Virginia slips by boat and sails away to Europe where she gathers the forces that will make up the Third Crusade. Among the leaders she gathers are King Philip II of France, Marquis Conrad of Montferrat, and the renowned Richard I also known as Richard the Lionheart of England. Together they sail to Acre where they lay siege to the city until finally capturing it. From that point onward, the crusaders and army of Saladin are locked in a struggle to obtain the city of Jerusalem. During this time, conspiracies abounded amongst both the armies of the crusaders and the commanders of Saladin, with each side respectively making and breaking deals to advance their individual agendas. Virginia schemes with both Philip and Conrad to displace Richard and to guarantee their own place as ruler of Jerusalem. Meanwhile, several of Saladin's commanders work to force battles

and push the crusaders out of the Holy Lands even against the will of Saladin. This all comes to a climax when Richard is shot by an Arab arrow while attempting to enter Jerusalem in order to negotiate with Saladin. This leads Saladin to enter the crusader camp unescorted to save Richard's life. The film comes to a conclusion as Richard and Saladin meet alone and in secret to negotiate a truce. Much to Richard's disappointment, Jerusalem will remain in the hands of Arabs but Christians will be permitted to come and go freely. Simultaneously, Saladin vows that he will not attempt to take any other crusader controlled territory.

Watching *Saladin* and *Kingdom of Heaven*, one can see several noticeable similarities between the two films, some for different reasons; likewise there are differences that are clear and some that are obscured. One of the earliest similarities between the films is the portrayal of Reynald of Chatillon as an instigator of violence between the Christians and the Muslims. In *Kingdom of Heaven*, he is portrayed as someone who sees the Muslim presence as a total threat to Christianity in the Holy Land. Throughout the film any reason given to avoid conflict with the Muslim army is seen as "heresy" and a lack of faith in God's decree that the Holy Land should belong to the Christians. It becomes clear as the film progresses that his fervent beliefs bring about his undoing. However, in *Saladin*, Reynald is portrayed as someone more concerned with the state of the treasury than men's souls. His reasons for attacking the caravans of Muslims are not motivated by religious fervor, but rather by pure greed. The two portrayals distinguish themselves from each other even further by Reynald's actions after the Battle of Hattin. It has been well documented that in actuality, Saladin offered water to the parched Guy of Lusignan after the Battle of Hattin, and Guy after drinking his fill, offered the rest to Reynald.⁵ After Reynald drank, Saladin commented that he was no longer obligated to show Reynald mercy because Saladin did not offer the water to Reynald, a sign of mercy and

⁵ Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 193-194.

respect, Saladin then proceeded to execute Reynald in front of Guy.⁶ The portrayals of these events in each film are extremely different and speak more about the decisions of the directors and writers than bigger historical contexts. In *Saladin*, Reynald makes demands, challenges Saladin, and overall shows nothing but disrespect at the meeting even though he is the prisoner. As a last show of arrogance when Saladin orders that water be brought to Guy, Reynald snatches the jug away from the attendant and drinks it in full view of the assembly, an act of defiance and disrespect towards Saladin. This leads to a full duel between Reynald and Saladin rather than an execution. In contrast, *Kingdom of Heaven* shows Reynald as being a victim of ineptitude when Saladin offers water to Guy and he in turn passes it to Reynald who gratefully accepts. When Saladin informs them of Reynald's misfortune, both are shocked and caught off guard leaving Saladin to quickly, even brutally, execute Reynald in front of Guy.

It is difficult to gauge the authenticity of each film's representation of Reynald because he was such a complex individual throughout the length of his life. In the early years of his life during the Second Crusade, one sees a man that is brutal to the point of receiving harsh criticism from his allies, as demonstrated by his 1153 raid on Cyprus.⁷ This is in contrast to the shrewd tactician in 1180 that urged Baldwin IV to rally troops at Kerak to protect the annual corn harvest or in 1183 when he had five galleons built and carried by camel to the Gulf of Aqaba to set sail for Mecca and Medina which shook Saladin and the Muslim world to its core.⁸ The last instance alone was enough for Saladin to want Reynald dead. Reynald's motives for attacking an Islamic caravan in the winter of 1186 still remain open for debate, however scholars like Thomas Asbridge have agreed that Reynald's actions were not what led to the Battle of Hattin and loss of Jerusalem in 1187.⁹

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Asbridge, 252.

⁸ Ibid., 318, 324.

⁹ Ibid., 343.

The portrayal of Reynald in both films is relatively accurate with the only contestable aspect being his raid on the Islamic caravan in 1186 as the event that reignited war in the Holy Land, ultimately leading to the Third Crusade. The reason for this has less to do with events of the time when these films were made and more to do with clean storytelling. The events leading to the Battle of Hattin are complicated on both sides. On the side of the Franks, there is the newly crowned Guy of Lusignan needing to secure his and Queen Sibylla's authority after Baldwin V died at age five in 1186;¹⁰ meanwhile, Saladin needed to keep momentum within his allied Islamic force before it disbanded at the end of autumn.¹¹ These historical facts would make a film retelling convoluted and most likely scare away the general audience. Presenting the war as the result of Reynald's actions in 1186 allows for a tighter film narrative that is accessible to a larger audience.

This leads to another character portrayal that separates both films, Guy of Lusignan. In *Kingdom of Heaven*, Guy is portrayed as a young, ambitious man out to control Jerusalem no matter the cost, and the goal of expelling Muslims from the Holy Land is simply a means to that end. Like Reynald in *Saladin*, Guy is defiant even when a prisoner. He believes that he will ultimately be victorious even when he is clearly defeated; it is not until Balian injures him in the streets of Jerusalem after a truce is reached with Saladin that doubt and defeat present themselves on Guy's face and he is forced to accept his failures. In contrast, *Saladin* portrays Guy as an older leader, a man more content, even determined, with maintaining the peace between Muslims and Christians. However, the greed of Reynald drags him and his knights into the Battle of Hattin. When standing before Saladin, Guy pays him all the proper respect, but more importantly, he has an air of acceptance of his own defeat. He clearly knows that his life is in the hands of Saladin yet he is not afraid, which is also different from the actual Guy who was terrified when he was before Saladin after Hattin.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 342.

¹¹ Maalouf, 190.

¹² Ibid., 194.

Both films misrepresent Guy of Lusignan but *Kingdom of Heaven* is further from the truth than *Saladin*, mainly for being a major character in the former and a minor in the latter. While it was true that Guy was ambitious in his pursuit of power in the Holy Land, it was not out of the ordinary for any noble born crusader; in fact his marriage to Sibylla occurred on the insistence of Baldwin IV so he could maintain control of the throne in Jerusalem,¹³ rather than the unhappy, contentious sham that is presented in *Kingdom of Heaven*. Both films also failed to capture the strategic workman-like mind of Guy, who repelled Saladin's forces on multiple occasions with the most notable being the Islamic forces' 1183 campaign through Galilee for which Guy received a great deal of ridicule for not being more aggressive in his resistance to the Islamic forces.¹⁴ Guy's portrayal is another anomaly like Reynald of Chatillon in that it is distorted more for simplicity's sake. In *Saladin*, Guy is simply a foil to Reynald's arrogance when before Saladin's mercy and forgiveness. In *Kingdom of Heaven*, Guy is nothing short of the primary antagonist; all the conflict between Muslims and Christians and the war as a whole are portrayed as results of his ambition and greed, which could not have been further from the truth.

One of the most egregious portrayals is that of the leper king Baldwin IV in *Kingdom of Heaven*. Within the film he is portrayed as a leader of religious tolerance amongst the crusaders; he strives to maintain peace with Saladin and the Ayyubid Empire, and he advocates for overall coexistence not only within Jerusalem but the entire Holy Land. This presentation of Baldwin IV is wildly different from the actual man who ruled Jerusalem. In all actuality, Baldwin was a devoted crusader who made every attempt to gain some type of advantage over Muslim forces during times of peace. One such example of this was in 1178 when Baldwin ordered the construction of a fortress at Jacob's Ford in the Upper Jordan during a truce with Saladin.¹⁵ Despite being offered 100,000 dinars

¹³ Asbridge, 323.

¹⁴ Ibid., 326-327.

¹⁵ Ibid., 311.

to abandon the fortification Baldwin continued to slowly move into the neutral zone between Christian Palestine and Muslim Syria until halted by Saladin in August of 1179 with the destruction of the fortress.¹⁶ Additionally, Baldwin IV was most likely also party to Reynald of Chatillon's naval excursion into the Red Sea in 1183, as well as authorizing raids into Damascus and Bosra in 1182 while Saladin was occupied elsewhere.¹⁷

Baldwin IV's portrayal was changed so dramatically within *Kingdom of Heaven* to serve as a call for multiple movements within the United States. A leading movement that Baldwin represents was the call for dialogue between civilizations rather than clashes. This film came out only a few years after President George W. Bush's infamous "'Crusade' Against Terrorism" speech which in the words of British Christian Science Monitor journalist Peter Ford "Passed almost unnoticed by Americans, [but] rang alarm bells in Europe."¹⁸ Ford went on to further write on how failure to distinguish politics from religion within the conversation would lead to a "clash of civilizations."¹⁹ Quotes like Ford's help to understand the parallels that Ridley Scott, an Englishman himself, was trying to draw between the disasters of Third Crusade and US presence in Iraq in 2004. Baldwin IV's attitude and actions throughout the film calls for discussion and contemplation, rather than emotionally driven action and sense of moral justification.

Baldwin IV's dialogue throughout *Kingdom of Heaven* stands out the most because it is mostly about accountability, honesty, and the overall conduct of a leader. Writer William Monahan spent much of 2003 developing the script for *Kingdom of Heaven*, which then filmed between January 12, 2004 and May 16, 2004.²⁰ During this time the United States launched its invasion of

¹⁶ Ibid., 312-315.

¹⁷ Ibid., 324.

¹⁸ Peter Ford, "Europe Cringes at Bush 'Crusade' Against Terrorists," *The Christian Science Monitor* (September 19, 2001).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Box office/business for Kingdom of Heaven," Internet Movie Database,

Iraq in 2003 and the CIA admitted to the falsification of its reports of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq on February 3, 2004.²¹ These events created a great deal of suspicion towards American leaders like Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and President George W. Bush not only in the minds of Americans, but other nations as well. What suggests this is a piece of dialogue from Baldwin to Balian about conduct: “When you stand before God, you cannot say, ‘But I was told by others to do thus’ or that ‘Virtue was not convenient at the time’. This will not suffice. Remember that.” This line of dialogue could be viewed as a call for better conduct in dealing with foreign and domestic relations, as well as giving a nod to audiences that they were not alone in their sentiments and feelings towards government as a whole.

Richard I (The Lionheart) holds a unique place within both films but to varying extents. A minor character in *Kingdom of Heaven*, Richard appears only at the end and is not given much depth, rather he is a visual representation of how the war for the Holy Land continues even after the fight ends for others. *Saladin*, in contrast, has Richard as a major character who serves as a European counter balance to Saladin. Unlike his fellow crusaders, Richard I is never portrayed as scheming or placed in a truly negative light; rather he is shown to be misguided at times but never malicious or arrogant. He is portrayed as the most outstanding among the other crusaders physically, morally, and spiritually while the other Europeans are portrayed as treacherous, greedy, and self-serving. Richard alone is willing to meet with Saladin, allowing Saladin to implore for a truce. Richard being swayed by Saladin was an allegorical reminder of when Nasser convinced the British to withdraw their military forces from Egypt in 1955²², after Nasser negotiated a treaty with Britain in 1954 to

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0320661/business?ref_=tt_dt_bus.

²¹ Timothy Corrigan, *Timeline-the 2000s, American Cinema of the 2000s: Themes and Variations* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2012), xi.

²² Viola Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class, and Nation* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 107.

evacuate all troops from the Suez Canal.²³ Historically Richard and Saladin never actually met each other in person.²⁴

This leads to a significant issue with the depiction of Richard's siege of Jerusalem, namely how it ended in *Saladin*. The film presents that Richard was won over by the morality and compassion of Saladin, but this is a far cry from the truth. Historically, the siege of Jerusalem ended mostly due to French forces under the leadership of Hugh of Burgundy returning to Jaffa in 1191 and Richard receiving news that his brother Prince John and French King Philip Augustus were working together to remove him from the English throne in 1192.²⁵ The final blow to Richard's campaign came in August of 1192 when he developed a debilitating fever that stole much of his strength to the point that he could not even read the truce he created with Saladin.²⁶ It is clear that Richard is meant to be a denouncement of the idea that all Western powers were looking to subdue and exploit Arab states within the context of when *Saladin* was released. *Saladin* was released in 1963, which was seven years after the Suez Crisis. One must ask what some of the consequences of the Suez Crisis were in 1956. Britain and France both lost a tremendous amount of standing within the global community.²⁷ The biggest result was the open condemnation by the United States and Soviet Union over the military action by Britain, Israel, and France followed by the open support of Egypt.²⁸ This was clear acknowledgement by the two world super powers of Egypt's sovereignty and elevated both nations in the eyes of Arabs, much the same way that Richard the Lionheart acknowledges the wisdom and strength of Saladin after he saves his life from, by no coincidence, European treachery and deceit.

²³ Martin Bunton and William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Westview Press, 2009), 309.

²⁴ Asbridge, 512.

²⁵ Ibid., 491 & 497

²⁶ Ibid., 511-512.

²⁷ Bunton and Cleveland, *A History*, 312.

²⁸ Ibid.

The final individual to be covered is none other than the titular Saladin as a man who is ever-present within both films yet is shown in two very different lights. *Kingdom of Heaven* presents Saladin as a pragmatic force that is always looming in the back of crusaders' minds. Through several of his exchanges with other individuals in the film, one would almost believe him to be an atheist or someone with a more modern sense of religion. This comes across clearest during the siege of Jerusalem when he has two exchanges with Balian; the first when Saladin asks for him to yield the city and Balian replies "Before I lose it, I will burn it to the ground. Your holy places – ours. Every last thing in Jerusalem that drives men mad."

To this Saladin simply replied "I wonder if it would not be better if you did." This exchange is concluded with Balian inquiring about the value of Jerusalem to Saladin, to which he replies "Nothing....Everything." This is a wildly different interpretation of Saladin then what is portrayed in the 1963 film. In it, Saladin is portrayed as a humble, pious man that wishes to avoid war. An example of his humility is demonstrated when he first meets with the crusader frontline after they take Acre. During the introduction, each of the crusaders lists their various titles and ranks; when the time comes for Saladin to introduce himself he says "Saladin, servant of God and of the Arabs." This was only one of the many instances of Saladin's humble acts within the film.

In historical fact, Saladin is somewhere in between these portrayals; he was regarded for his moral uprightness and humility, yet he was also feared for his shrewdness and logicity. An example of this would be the 1180 truce he agreed to with Baldwin IV, which was unpopular among many members of the Ayyubid court; Saladin explained to the caliph that the truce was necessary so he could lead forces into the Upper Euphrates against Kilij Arslan and the Armenian ruler of Cilicia, Rouspenak III, because they posed a threat to the sacred struggle against the crusaders. However, in truth this was an expansion of the Ayyubid Empire

led by Saladin.²⁹ An important aspect of Saladin's military career and personal life that both films gloss over is the fact that Saladin was a devoted sultan of the Ayyubid Empire. Expansion of the Ayyubid Empire was the main reason Saladin agreed to prolonged truces with the crusaders in the Levant. His continued peace with Baldwin IV from 1182 through 1183 was so he could lead a military campaign into Aleppo and Mosul.³⁰

The portrayal of Saladin being overly merciful and generous is also over exaggerated. After capturing the sailors that Reynald of Chatillon dispatched into Arabia in 1183, Saladin had the sailors separated and taken to various cities where they were publicly executed, with two more being taken to Mecca during the Hajj where they were butchered like animals on an altar.³¹ Despite his many acts of brutality, however, Saladin could also be tolerant and compassionate. An example of this was after his successful siege of Jerusalem on October 2, 1187; with the inhabitants having refused all his offers for surrender until he breached the walls, he was not obliged to show them any mercy, however he allowed the people to buy their freedom: ten dinars for every man, five for every woman, and one for every child.³² After accepting this offer, Balian of Ibalin beseeched Saladin to let 7,000 of Jerusalem's poor go for only 30,000 dinars, which Saladin agreed to.³³ After entering Jerusalem, Saladin heard from his brother about the poor that were gathered around the gates to beg. In response, Saladin agreed to free 1,000 people without ransom; hearing this, the Frankish patriarch of Jerusalem asked if seven hundred more could not be freed and Balian followed by asking for another five hundred; both of their requests were granted.³⁴ Saladin followed this act by freeing all imprisoned men with young children and the

²⁹ Asbridge, 316-317.

³⁰ Ibid., 320-322.

³¹ Ibid., 324-325.

³² Maalouf, 198.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 199.

elderly.³⁵ And as his final act of charity, he not only offered complete exemption to orphans and widows but money and other gifts for their travels, much to the frustration of his treasurers.³⁶

Much like his history of being the sultan of the Ayyubid Empire, Saladin's ethnicity as a Kurd is also annexed from his identity within both films. While this did not define Saladin, it was an aspect of him that was strangely absent. In the case of the 1963 film, it has to do with two facts. The first was that the film was supposed to be portraying Saladin as a prototype Nasser, an early Pan-Arab unifier; this representation strengthened the ideas Nasser was spreading in the 1960s. The second reason was to emphasize the difference between Arabs and Europeans; throughout the film, the differences between the crusaders were constantly being presented, while Saladin's Kurdish origin was replaced instead with a stronger Islamic and Arab identity to promote the idea of a unified "Arabness" against a disorganized European coalition.³⁷ In the case of *Kingdom of Heaven* it was most likely done to prevent confusion with American audiences since many Americans related Islam with being Arab. When *Kingdom of Heaven* came to theaters in 2005, Islamophobia within the United States was rising, as proven in a study by the Pew Research Center, which found that by 2005, 41 percent of Americans had an unfavorable view of Islam.³⁸ One of the goals of the film was to relieve the fears of Americans towards Islam and Arabs. Adding the fact that Saladin was not Arab would only have caused audiences to lose the overall message of the film.

The pivotal depictions in both of these films were the large battles that occurred in the Third Crusade. Between the two films, audiences could witness the Battle of Hattin, Saladin's 1187 Siege of Jerusalem, the crusaders' 1189 Siege of Acre, and Richard I's

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 199-200.

³⁷ Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema*, 107.

³⁸ "Prospects for Inter-Religious Understanding: Will Views Towards Muslims and Islam Follow Historical Trends?" Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center. 2006. 4.

1192 Siege of Jerusalem. Each of these battles was not only fundamental in the crafting of each film, but in shaping actual events in the Third Crusade.

The Battle of Hattin is presented in both films, but to varying degrees. In *Saladin*, it is the introduction to Saladin's brilliance as he devises a way for his small army to defeat the Christian army of 100,000 men using a combination of cutting off the crusaders' water supply and clever battle tactics. In reality Saladin had a larger force than the crusaders, which consisted of only 1,200 knights and between 15,000 to 18,000 infantrymen.³⁹ This was a clear embellishment meant for Arab audiences and enforced the idea of Saladin as an Islamic and Arab hero. In contrast, *Kingdom of Heaven* gives a realistic look at what the weather and terrain would have been like for the Christian army and how it affected the armies strength, going so far as to show men dropping dead from the heat. *Kingdom of Heaven* follows this scene with one showing the decimated crusader forces scattered about the battlefield of Hattin with vultures circling above. While *Kingdom of Heaven* does not directly depict the struggle at the Battle of Hattin, it presents a more historically accurate idea of the battle and proceeds to drive home how devastating the loss was for the Christian forces.

The Siege of Jerusalem is covered only in *Kingdom of Heaven*, but it does capture the havoc and fear within the city when Saladin began his siege. *Kingdom of Heaven* accurately shows how outnumbered and ill-equipped the Christian army was in defending Jerusalem from Saladin and his army. An aspect that the film covers in its depiction of the siege was how quick it was. Beginning on September 20th, the siege lasted until a wall was breached on the 29th of September.⁴⁰ In the film, Balian is extremely aware of Saladin's power and knows that only by getting Saladin to agree to terms of surrender for the city could its populace be saved. This attitude to bring Saladin to terms mirrors

³⁹ Asbridge, 345.

⁴⁰ Maalouf, 197

the actual stand point of Balian of Ibalin who had only a few knights and soldiers under his command, as well as a population of Christians that sided with Saladin within the city.⁴¹ The film captures the desperation and courage of the crusader defending Jerusalem, while also showing the momentum and sense of inevitability within the ranks of Saladin's army. This section of *Kingdom of Heaven* captures the essence of the actual event and unabashedly presents it to viewers in a way that brings the history to life.

The Siege of Acre in 1189 is one of the most poorly presented of the battles that occurred in *Saladin*'s presentation of events of the Third Crusade. *Saladin* shows the siege as being primarily naval based with the German King Fredrick Barbarossa giving his life to raise the flag of Christendom in the city of Acre. This depiction of the Siege of Acre is wildly inaccurate from the actual siege for numerous reasons, the primary problem being the death of King Barbarossa and the time it took to take Acre. Beginning with the latter, the siege began in August of 1189 and lasted until July of 1191,⁴² almost two years. Acre was a long, bloody siege that was sustained only through continued reinforcements by the armies of Richard the Lionheart, Conrad of Montferrat, and Philip II Augustus.⁴³ Fredrick Barbarossa's death was another exaggeration within the film. In truth, Barbarossa drowned in a stream before he even reached Syria in 1190.⁴⁴ This news shocked both crusaders and Arabs that one of the most powerful leaders from Europe was gone and that his expeditionary force had dissolved.⁴⁵ There are two other factors that were also missing from the film's presentation of the Siege of Acre. The first being Saladin's inability to break the siege, despite his best efforts,⁴⁶ however this would not have been in the interest of

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Asbridge, 402 & 443

⁴³ Ibid., 403 & 428-429.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 421.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 412-417.

anyone involved with the making of the film under the film regulations and nationalizations established by Gamal abd al-Nasser only a few years before.⁴⁷ The second problem was that the siege was not shown to be initiated by the dethroned Guy of Lusigna, who ensured constant pressure was being placed on the city while also foiling all of Saladin's counter-attacks until reinforcements arrived in 1191.⁴⁸ From a film narrative perspective, this could have very easily been a point of redemption for Guy after losing the Battle of Hattin in 1187, consequently followed by Jerusalem.

The final event, and most inaccurate, is Richard I's 1192 Siege of Jerusalem. *Saladin* shows the siege occurring in the month of December with a few days of heated, bloody battle with Richard and Saladin both calling for a temporary respite so that all Christians could celebrate and worship the birth of Jesus. During this time, Saladin convinces Richard to agree to a truce and the withdrawal of Christian forces. While the ideas in the film make for great entertainment, the historical inaccuracies make it nothing but an enjoyable "what if" scenario. In historical fact, the crusaders never reached the gates of Jerusalem; at one point, they came within a few hours march of the Holy City but nothing more.⁴⁹ Additionally, the march to Jerusalem occurred in June of 1191 with the negotiations between Richard and Saladin taking place throughout early 1192.⁵⁰ The main reason for this stall in the crusaders' rapid advance to Jerusalem was disagreements between the nobles that were leading the efforts. Tensions became so high that Richard resigned as commander of the crusader forces on 17 June 1191, which brought the Christian army to a standstill.⁵¹ This was the death knell for Richard the Lionheart's march to Jerusalem

⁴⁷ Walter Armbrust, "The Rise and Fall of Nationalism in the Egyptian Cinema," in *Social Construction of Nationalism in the Middle East*, ed. Fatma Muge Gocek (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 229-230

⁴⁸ Asbridge, 401-420.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 508.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 509 & 512-513.

⁵¹ Ibid., 507-508.

with its official conclusion coming on September 2, 1192 when Saladin and Richard signed terms for a truce.⁵² While fictitious, *Saladin's* depiction of Richard I's 1192 siege of Jerusalem is nothing short of an intriguing idea of what Richard's campaign could have been like had he not relinquished command of the crusader forces in 1191.

A theme that is present within both films is the idea of religious tolerance. Each film promotes tolerance for very different reasons. Chief among them was the political and social climates of the time when each film was released. *Saladin* came out in 1963 when Gamal abd al-Nasser's Arab unity movement was being reinforced through films and other forms of nationalizations to rally the Egyptian populace.⁵³ Within the film, one of Saladin's commanders, Issa, is revealed to be a Christian; when asked by a crusader why he fights for the Muslim army, his response was simply for Arab unity. This was clearly a push through film to bring together the different religious groups of Egypt not as separate religious sects, but as unified Egyptians working towards a common goal of a stronger nation free of Western control.⁵⁴ Another historical factor for the insertion of Issa was the mass expulsion of Jewish, British, and French nationals from Egypt in 1956 after the Suez Crisis.⁵⁵ This caused thousands of Egyptians to leave behind the only home they ever knew and travel to countries they had never visited before.⁵⁶ This aspect of the film was to not only unite the Arabs of the Middle East in the wake of the failed United Arab Republic in 1961,⁵⁷ but also dissolve the separation Egyptians were creating between ethnic and religious groups.

Kingdom of Heaven is also clearly promoting the institution of religious tolerance through many of the actions and dialogue of characters over the course of the film. One of the earliest examples

⁵² Ibid., 512.

⁵³ Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 169

⁵⁴ Ibid., 169-170.

⁵⁵ Bunton and Cleveland, 312.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 314.

of this is how seriously Baldwin IV takes the laws negotiated between himself and Saladin so seriously that he sentences even Templar knights to death when they break those laws. Another comes when Baldwin gives orders to Balian to be especially protective of Jewish and Muslim travelers along the roads not for political protection or economic gain, but simply because it is the right thing to do. One of the most iconic and famous scenes in the film is when Saladin walks through Jerusalem and finds a crucifix lying on the ground. Rather than stepping on or over it, Saladin picks it up and places it back on the alter from which it had fallen. This scene depicts the acceptance Saladin has for the Christian presence in Jerusalem despite the bloody history of the past.

This by all accounts contrasts with how both men behaved in their time. Baldwin IV during his lifetime was not a proponent of Christian and Muslim spiritual coexistence within the Holy Land; however, it was clear he understood the economic importance of the Arab presence. The traveler Ibn Jubayr noted that trade between Cairo and Damascus had not been interrupted when he visited Damascus in 1184 which was a contested time between the Franks and Muslims.⁵⁸ What he noticed was that when the Muslim traders entered Christian territory, they paid a reasonable, standardized tax on their goods and were then allowed free passage through the territory; Ibn Jubayr also noticed that the same was true for Christian traders that passed through Islamic territory.⁵⁹ This shows that concern for protecting various religious caravans was not done out of religious tolerance or moral code, but rather for a steady revenue stream for both sides. This places a new viewpoint on Baldwin's orders to protect caravans in *Kingdom of Heaven*. Perhaps Baldwin's orders were made not just for the sake of tolerance and chivalry, but also for financial stability and profit, which adds a layer of practicality to the film's message of acceptance and tolerance.

⁵⁸ Maalouf, 185.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Saladin's march through Jerusalem in *Kingdom of Heaven* is also quite misleading and while it does serve the themes and overall message of the film, it does so on a significant bending of the historical truth. While it was true that Saladin did permit Christian pilgrims unrestricted access to holy sites in Jerusalem, it did not become an Ayyubid practice until after Richard I's march to Jerusalem in 1192.⁶⁰ After Saladin took Jerusalem in 1187, he had his soldiers immediately begin "purifying" the holy sites that the Franks had "tainted."⁶¹ Of the sites "purified" was the Dome of the Rock, which the Christians had named the Templum Domini (Church of Our Lord), but which Muslims believe houses the rock Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son on and which Muhammad ascended into heaven from.⁶² The Muslim forces had removed the alter and all art the Christians had placed inside the Dome, burned incense and sprinkled rose water throughout the site, and finally ripped the cross down from the golden colored dome.⁶³ The historical actions of Saladin are a sharp contrast with the actions of Saladin in *Kingdom of Heaven*, but it is important to note that Saladin did engage in dialogue with Christians and eventually worked out a peace with the crusaders in 1192. In both of these situations, director Ridley Scott distorted the historical facts, which is always dangerous because it can affect peoples' perception of history, changing how they perceive events of the present. However, Scott bent these facts in a way that highlighted one of the core lessons from the Third Crusade, that zealousness and over-devotion to a cause can be devastating to multiple groups of people because clashes of civilization never have good results. Through that perspective, Scott captures the distilled historical warning of the crusades at a time when emotions, tensions, and ambitions were running rampant in the United States and other parts of the world.

⁶⁰ Asbridge, 512.

⁶¹ Ibid., 362.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

Another aspect of *Saladin* is the portrayal of Saladin and the direct relation to Nassir as a leader and a national figure. The film presents Saladin as a Pan-Arab leader seeking to unite the downtrodden Arab peoples of the Holy Land for the purpose of throwing off the oppressive presence of the crusaders. This remarkably parallels Gamal abd al-Nasser's struggle to unite the Arab world to stomp out the interference of the Western world in Arab affairs.⁶⁴ Saladin was also portrayed as being morally upright to the point of righteousness and having wisdom beyond his years, in addition to his generosity and tolerance for other religions; all traits that Nasser tried to portray within himself.⁶⁵ Despite his attempts at over-grandeurizing himself, Nasser still understood the power of cinema to shape opinions and create support. Anwar Sadat himself had a love for cinema that ran so deep he almost missed the 1952 coup because he was at a movie.⁶⁶

This leads to a final factor in the development of *Saladin*, the laws of censorship regarding film. While Nasser reformed the censorship laws in 1955, they were still vague with their declaration to "Protect public morals, to preserve security, public order, and the superior interests of the state."⁶⁷ This vague regulation put many filmmakers in a difficult position; what qualified as a "threat" to security, morality, or the state? More importantly, what were the punishments for breaking these censorship laws? The answer was simple enough; make films that promoted Egyptian nationalism, pride, and unity either directly or through allegory and everything would be fine.⁶⁸ Over time the laws became slightly more defined but still vague enough that directors and actors had to be wary of clauses such as "good morals" and "public safety" in their works.⁶⁹ Another factor in the regulation of Egyptian cinema was that Nasser began nationalizing

⁶⁴ Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema*, 106

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶⁸ Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 35

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

the film industry beginning in 1960.⁷⁰ This allowed for an increase in original and risk taking films to be produced by directors that no longer had to consider how marketable a film was to audiences.⁷¹ In fact, by 1963 one third of all theaters in Egypt were owned by the government.⁷²

The director of *Saladin*, Youssef Chahine is arguably a master of manipulating the regulations on Middle Eastern cinema to his artistic whims. Having worked in the Egyptian film industry since the early 1950s and being a Christian in a predominantly Muslim country, Chahine learned many ways of presenting his own views while still skating past government censorship laws.⁷³ As previously mentioned, one of Saladin's commanders in the film is a Christian that fights alongside his Arab brothers for the greater good. The film does highlight how Issa feels and is marginalized by the other leaders, while Saladin accepts him unconditionally. Even when the crusaders gain the slightest advantage in the battle for Jerusalem, Issa is immediately suspect in aiding them and betraying his Arab brothers. However, through the great leadership and vision of Saladin, these suspicions are quickly banished and Issa is accepted fully by the rest of the commanders. In this single decision on direction, Chahine has called out the marginalization of religious minorities within Egypt but has still protected himself from backlash by framing it within a call for Arab unity. That is merely a single instance of the tight rope filmmakers in the Middle East have to walk to both express their ideas and keep themselves out of prison.

Film is a powerful source of media that can capture the imaginations of millions of people from around the world and give each of them different ideas and feelings. Likewise, film can perfectly encapsulate movements and changes going on in a

⁷⁰ Walter Armbrust, *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East & Beyond* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 292.

⁷¹ Ibid., 292-293.

⁷² Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema*, 282-283.

⁷³ Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 34-37.

society by way of its themes or story, as seen in both *Kingdom of Heaven* and *Saladin*. Both films, despite their historical inaccuracies, capture the spirit of the Third Crusade not just through their presentations of epic battles and sieges, nor their portrayals of men and women that were and are still considered inspiring, nor even the costumes and constructs that transport one back in time; it is the messages of tolerance, courage in the face of overwhelming odds, and above all, the need for dialogue between civilization rather than war and violence.

Both films do not shy away from showing the costs associated with war: the death, destruction, treachery, deceit, and sorrow, after it is over. Each film also tells a historical narrative of what was happening when they were made. In the case of *Saladin*, one sees the call for Pan-Arabism and Egyptian unity in the face of Western plotting, as well as the promotion of Gamal Abd al-Nasser as the next great Arab hero. This was not a trend that would continue into the 1970s, where satire and mockery of Gamal Abd al-Nasser and his push for Arab unity became standard.⁷⁴ While directors of the 1960s promoted Pan-Arabism, directors of the 1970s discussed how Egyptians could become alienated within their own country.⁷⁵ In *Kingdom of Heaven*, one sees the call for dialogue between nations rather than politically and ideologically fueled conflict, in addition to leaders and organizations conducting themselves in the manner that is expected of them through deeds, not words. Like *Saladin*, *Kingdom of Heaven* suffered a similar problem of audiences in America having changes in theatrical taste, with a demand for films that were pure fantasy or firmly established in reality and historical fact.⁷⁶ Even when *Kingdom of Heaven* was released, its ideas of dialogue and tolerance were overshadowed by films like *How Little We Know about Our Neighbors*, which focused on the idea of being under constant surveillance, playing to American sensibilities and fears in 2005.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Armbrust, "The Rise," 229-230.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 233.

⁷⁶ Corrigan, 103.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 134-137.

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Film can be a medium from which events can be discussed over hundreds of miles and decades of time. Cinema was, is, and shall be the revolutionary medium that enables many stories of both historic and fictitious manners to be told to present generations and preserved for future generations. Film can inspire people to action, to become better than they are. It can pass on a lesson from the past or it can create hope for the future. The silver screen will continue to be a part of history, preserving the past and enlightening the future. To borrow from *Kingdom of Heaven*, it is worth nothing. And everything.

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History in the Making